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Beyond skill: The role of mindset and grit in reducing counselor burnout

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BEYOND SKILL: THE ROLE OF MINDSET AND GRIT IN REDUCING COUNSELOR BURNOUT

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BEYOND SKILL: THE ROLE OF MINDSET AND GRIT IN REDUCING

COUNSELOR BURNOUT

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ABSTRACT

BEYOND SKILL: THE ROLE OF MINDSET AND GRIT IN REDUCING COUNSELOR BURNOUT

By

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Dissertation supervised by Dr. Matthew Bundick

Due to the challenging nature of their work, counselors are highly susceptible to burnout. Given the high prevalence of burnout in the profession, it is important to identify and better understand potential safeguards against it. Counselor self-efficacy is one factor that has been found to function as a safeguard; however, there has been little research that examines personality factors that may influence counselor self-efficacy and serve as buffers against burnout. Prior to this study, the constructs of mindset and grit, which have been found in the broader fields of educational and social psychology to promote self-efficacy and performance, have not been examined in the counseling field. This study proposed and investigated a theory-based process model that describes the roles that grit and mindset play in reducing burnout and increasing counselor self-efficacy. Participants were self-identified counselors who completed an online survey

composed of demographic questions and established measures of each of the constructs under investigation. Results indicated that there is a moderate-to-strong negative relationship between counselor self-efficacy and burnout and that mindset and grit both have a small-to-moderate positive relationship with counselor self-efficacy. Practical implications and future directions for research are presented.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memories of my grandparents Jean Novotny, Joann McMaster, and Charles McMaster. I know that you were with me every step of the way.

> "Move *before* you think you are ready. It is as if you are making it a little more difficult for yourself, deliberately creating obstacles in your path. When you feel that you must work harder to get to your goal because you are not quite prepared, you are more alert and inventive. This venture *has* to succeed, and so it will."
>
> *Curtis Jackson*

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Burnout is a major concern in the helping professions. The construct was first introduced by Freudenberger (1974) and was defined as physical and emotional depletion at work. The current working definition of burnout has not strayed far from its original delineation. Burnout is characterized as a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to stressors in the workplace and includes three core dimensions: emotional and physical exhaustion, characterized by feelings of being overwhelmed or overextended at work; depersonalization, which includes feeling uninterested in or disconnected from clients; and reduced personal accomplishment, which is characterized by feelings of helplessness as a counselor (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012).

Beyond the impact of burnout on the counselor's personal well-being, burnout also can have negative effects on a counselor's therapeutic effectiveness (Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010). Wilkerson and Bellini (2006) reported that counselors feel pulled in too many directions and report high levels of stress, which, over an extended period of time, can lead to burnout and, consequently, negatively affect delivery of services to clients. According to the American Counseling Association (2014), counselors have a responsibility to do no harm and, therefore, should avoid practicing while symptoms of burnout are present. However, up to two-thirds of mental health workers may be experiencing high levels of burnout (Morse, Salyers, Rollins, & Pfahler, 2012). Burnout is increasingly viewed as a concern in the counseling profession, and the literature supports that it can have a negative impact on both counselors and their clients (Oser, Biebel, Pullen, & Harp, 2013).

Fortunately, research has uncovered a number of potential protective factors against burnout. For example, self-efficacy has been found to have a negative relationship to burnout, and individuals who are more self-efficacious address change and difficulties with more ease (Gündüz, 2012). According to Landrum, Knight, and Flynn (2012), burnout and counselor self-efficacy are important concepts to understand and consider when battling high turnover rates, low productivity, poor client interactions, and other undesirable counseling conditions.

Additionally, many of the skills with which counselors engage on a daily basis may promote psychological well-being and protect against burnout, such as mindfulness, resilience, self-discipline, and persistence (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Though these constructs have received little attention in the counseling literature, in the realm of education psychology, researchers have demonstrated how talent and skill are important but insufficient predictors of achievement, and alone are not enough to maintain success and persist in the face of adversity. Two constructs have emerged in the psychological literature as important contributions toward understanding how both learners and educators achieve and perform to the best of their abilities: grit, which can be defined as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" and entails "working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress" (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007, p. 1087), and mindset, which refers to one's belief about one's personal characteristics as being either fixed or malleable (Dweck, 2006).

This study seeks to broaden the scope of the grit and mindset research beyond the domain of educational psychology and apply it to the field of counseling. Literature in

the adjacent and broader fields of education and psychology provides a framework for understanding how these constructs may prove useful in the counseling field.

Although few scholars have directly made these connections, there are many obvious parallels between teachers and counselors. In much of the counseling literature, the term *therapeutic alliance* surfaces. Therapeutic alliance refers to an active and conscious collaboration process between the counselor and client (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003), which includes agreement on goals, assignment of tasks, and the development of bonds (Bordin, 1979). Clients who report a strong therapeutic alliance or stronger rapport with their counselors tend to have more successful treatment outcomes in regard to both perception of treatment success and symptom reduction (Krupnick et al., 1996). Similarly, students whose relationships with their teachers are characterized by high levels of support and low levels of conflict obtain higher scores on measures of academics and behavioral adjustment than do students whose relationships with teachers are less positive (Wu, Hughes, & Kwok, 2010).

Counselors and teachers alike share the struggle that the desired outcomes of their work, i.e., developmental benefits for their clients and students, often do not manifest until well after the completion of treatment or classroom learning experiences. According to Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth (2014), teachers' inability to observe their impact on students is the most disheartening aspect of their work. Despite the frustration associated with this, many teachers and counselors stay committed to the field for long periods of time, sometimes decades. One factor that has been found to explain these teachers' persistence, achievement, and long-term success despite their challenges and adversity is grit (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014).

Grit is far more than just being momentarily resilient; it also involves having deep commitments that one remains dedicated to over time (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). Grit is similar to resiliency in that it contains positive responses to failure or adversity. It differs from resiliency in its focus on long-term stamina rather than short-term intensity (Duckworth et al., 2007). Grit has been shown to predict achievements in academic, vocational, and avocational domains (Von Culin, Tsukayama, & Duckworth, 2014). One study found that perseverance in the face of adversity is strongly associated with an orientation toward engagement (Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007). Engagement, or rapport building, is one of the most important qualities of successful client outcomes in counseling (Krupnick et al., 1996).

Von Culin et al. (2014) found that grit contains two distinct but related components: effort and interest. One aspect of grit that links it to successful outcomes is deliberate practice (Duckworth & Eskreis-Winkler, 2013). In the field of counseling, this is often referred to as intentionality. Surprisingly, despite its conceptual overlap with related constructs, grit has never been explored in relation to the field of counseling. Thus, it is ripe for investigation with regard to how it may provide insight and an alternative view of the success of long-term counselors and their ability to remain committed to the field despite working under often overwhelming, burnout-inducing circumstances.

Whereas grit is in itself an important personality characteristic to understand in the context of burnout among counselors, it may be equally important to better understand related constructs that influence grit. One construct thought to promote grit that has garnered much attention in the psychological literature is mindset. For example,

Duckworth and Eskreis-Winkler (2013) found moderate, positive associations between grit and growth mindset. Dweck (1988, 2006) described two distinct mindsets: fixed and growth. A fixed mindset entails believing that one's basic qualities (such as one's personality or intelligence) are carved in stone. A growth mindset is based on the belief that one's basic qualities can be cultivated through effort. Social-cognitive and educational psychology research have determined that a growth mindset regarding one's abilities translates into engagement, well-being, attributional styles, learning goals, and school satisfaction (Karwowski, 2014, p. 62).

The counseling field tends to have individuals who are considered "lifelong learners" (Livneh, 1988). As a social science that focuses on human interaction, counseling and the nature of counseling work requires practitioners to constantly assess and reassess their skills, knowledge, and perspective. Those with a growth mindset seek to increase their ability to master new skills and typically focus on learning goals. However, individuals with a fixed mindset focus on seeking validation and maintaining positive judgments of their abilities (Dweck, 2000). They tend to avoid anything that may pose a challenge that could result in failure or discredit them in any way (Elliott & Dweck, 1988).

Importantly, neither grit nor growth mindset are fixed characteristics. Influenced by theories of personality and social perception, Dweck, Chiu, and Hong (1995) developed a model of how implicit beliefs influence people's lives. They describe how the two different assumptions people make about the malleability of personal attributes directly affect the choices they make (Dweck et al., 1995). Dweck and Leggett (1988) found that a fixed mindset can lead to maladaptive helpless responses, avoidance, lower

success and engagement in social domains, and decreased persistence. In contrast, having a growth mindset can lead to greater internal motivation, higher self-esteem, and exhibit a strong desire to set and achieve goals (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Mindset (fixed or growth) is the worldview we adopt for ourselves regarding our intelligence and abilities and it is something we have control over (Dweck, 2006). Like mindset, grit also is not a fixed trait. It has been suggested that having a growth mindset could develop grit (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015).

Purpose and Research Questions

Historically, mindset and grit have been researched solely in the realm of education and social psychology. They have been extensively examined in terms of student success, academic achievement, productivity, and motivation. For example, Duckworth et al. (2007) found that grit is a greater predictor of academic success than is IQ. Mindset research has demonstrated that how people view their abilities strongly affects the way they live their lives (Chase, 2010). Particularly, if individuals believe their talent and abilities are fixed, they tend to believe they either have what it takes to succeed or they don't. These individuals would most likely avoid situations that may call their skills, abilities, or intelligence into question.

In contrast, individuals with a growth mindset believe that their characteristics are unfixed and, therefore, are more likely to embrace challenges and work tenaciously to accomplish something (Dweck, 2006). Numerous findings support the claim that having a growth mindset will promote greater self-efficacy (Kanfer, 1990), incite more effort for a longer period of time toward a goal (Jourden, Bandura, & Banfield, 1991), and positively influence athletic performance (Potgieter & Steyn, 2010).

These findings from the social and educational psychology literatures suggest that addressing the grit and mindset constructs with mental health professionals may present opportunities for new avenues for professional harm reduction. For example, for individuals who may have less grit, an intervention or professional development program focused on developing a growth mindset may serve to increase grit and, in turn, counselor self-efficacy toward the numerous beneficial ends of lower burnout rates, less turnover, increased workplace and life satisfaction, and, ultimately, more successful outcomes with clients. A greater understanding of the potential roles of grit and mindset also could prove useful during early stages of graduate school and training programs for educators to take a more proactive approach and build in trainings and lessons that foster gritty, growth-minded counselors-in-training.

This study seeks to advance this understanding by proposing a process model to explain how the constructs of mindset, grit, counselor self-efficacy, and burnout interact and influence one another. In the proposed model, the hypothesized relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy is partially mediated by grit. As an extension of the process model, the relationship between counselor self-efficacy and burnout was explored (Figure 1). This study investigated three primary research questions: (1) To what extent does counselor self-efficacy predict reduced burnout? (2) Does mindset and grit affect counselor self-efficacy? and (3) To what extent is the relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy mediated through grit?

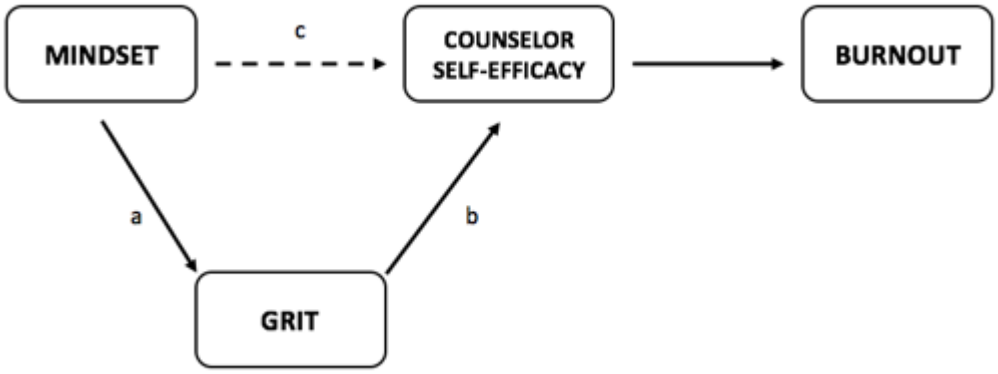


Figure 1. Proposed mediation process model of the relationships among mindset, grit, counselor self-efficacy, and burnout.

Statement of Potential Significance

Mindset and grit are relatively new terms that have been examined primarily within the domain of education, but their implications extend far beyond the classroom. The current study aims to bridge the identified gap and will help to conceptualize these key constructs by providing a context for their application in the realm of counseling. Past literature has delineated that burnout and counselor self-efficacy are important concepts to understand and consider when battling high turnover rates, low productivity, poor client interactions, and other undesirable counseling conditions (Landrum et al., 2012). This study sought to explore what role grit and mindset play in reducing burnout and increasing counselor self-efficacy to promote successful client outcomes. Grounded in the literature, the process model presented in the current research includes potential protective factors that may prove more effective than traditionally identified factors in increasing counselor self-efficacy and decreasing counselor burnout.

This study adds to the literature in the field, and the knowledge that is gained benefits the counseling profession by identifying constructs, beyond those already

established in the existing literature, that contribute to counselor self-efficacy and burnout, which, in turn, could encourage early-intervention strategies. The understanding of mindset and grit in the context of counseling also could prove useful during early stages of graduate school and training programs, where educators could take a more preemptive approach and build in trainings and lessons that foster gritty, growth-minded counselors.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used to guide this research study is grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory, which describes the interaction in human behavior of personal factors, behavior, and the environment (Sawyer, Peters, & Willis, 2013), and Dweck's self-theories, which are people's beliefs about themselves and how those particular beliefs can create a unique psychological world (Dweck, 2000). Social cognitive theory and self-theories both help to explain that mindsets play a role in not only the view that individuals hold about their intelligence, skills, and abilities, but also that those particular belief systems can directly or indirectly affect thinking, feeling, acting, and interacting in different ways. Social cognitive theorists believe that individuals set goals and expectations and control their learning and behavior to achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 1971).

Dweck (2000) went one step further to explain that the goals set by individuals are directly related to their mindset and are motivated by either achievement (goals set for the sake of winning a favorable or positive judgment of oneself or from others) or learning (goals that are set to explicitly challenge oneself beyond the knowledge and skills that are already known). At the foundation of the process model presented in this

research study is mindset. Understanding mindset within the context of social cognitive theory and self-theory, i.e., the why and how of individuals' creating and following through with goals, is essential to the conceptual understanding of how mindset influences counselor self-efficacy and burnout.

Summary of Methodology

This study sought to explore whether relationships exist among mindset, grit, counselor self-efficacy and burnout, and if so, the strength of their relationships. It was, therefore, fitting to conduct a quantitative study to gather primary data using an online survey method. The principal focus was to use the existing scales that have demonstrated strong reliability and validity to gain information on how the variables of grit, growth mindset, counselor self-efficacy, and burnout interrelate. This study explored the work of practicing counselors; therefore, the sample consisted of self-identified professional counselors who were at least 18 years of age and had some level of post-training clinical experience (i.e., counseling experience beyond practicum or internship) in the counseling field. Participants were classified into three groups: (a) novice counselors, less than one year of post-training clinical experience; (b) advanced counselors, one to 10 years of experience; and (c) experienced counselors, more than 10 years of experience in the field.

The literature has shown that professional experience plays an important role in counselor self-efficacy and burnout. Differences in counselor self-efficacy seem to occur with training level, developmental level, and age (Larson & Daniels, 1998). Years of professional experience is positively related to counselor self-efficacy and inversely related to burnout (Thompson, Amatea, & Thompson, 2014). Due to these previously established relationships and their potential to influence the results of the present study,

years of professional experience was controlled for in all analyses. A process model is presented in this research to demonstrate the hypothesized relationship between the constructs.

Limitations

Whereas all studies have limitations, there are four limitations to the present study worthy of note. First, the study is limited in terms of its generalizability to the total population of professional counselors. While the study's sample was quite diverse in terms of specific area of counseling, age, and number of years of experience in the field, the fact remains that certain segments of the professional counseling population are not included.

A second potential limitation of the study is that all instruments in this study were self-reported, indicating that they measured counselors' perceptions, not actual outcomes. The study did not gather any data related to actual counseling outcomes and did not include clients' perceptions of the counseling relationship or outcomes.

The third limitation is based on social desirability bias. For example, burnout, a prevalent problem in the counseling field, has a negative connotation; conversely, counselor self-efficacy, grit, and growth mindset are generally considered desirable qualities. Therefore, it is possible that participants may not have felt comfortable expressing the presence of extreme burnout symptoms, or low levels of self-efficacy, grit, or growth mindset, regardless of the anonymity in the survey design.

The final limitation is based on the fact that the data gathered were cross-sectional, i.e., gathered at one point in time simply as a snapshot to reflect social conditions. These types of data are limited in that they cannot describe changes over time

or cause-and-effect relationships. Thus, the directionality of effects in the present process model are based on the theoretical linkages, as empirical claims of directionality cannot be made without longitudinal or experimental data.

Definition of Key Terms

Burnout: A prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job; it is comprised of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1984).

Counselor Self-Efficacy: The belief that one has the ability to perform counseling in a way that will produce particular client outcomes. Further, counseling self-efficacy is believed to be associated with training and experience (Melchert, Hays, Wiljanen, & Kolocek, 1996).

Growth Mindset: The belief that qualities, including intelligence, can be changed and cultivated through awareness, efforts, and hard work (Dweck, 2000).

Fixed Mindset: The belief that one has only a certain amount of intelligence, static personality, and unchanging character (Dweck, 2000).

Grit: Passion and perseverance for long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). Grit has two related but distinct factors: effort and interest (Von Culin et al., 2014).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no shortage of literature when it comes to defining and understanding the problems of counselor burnout. The concept was first introduced by Freudenberger (1974) and was defined as physical and emotional depletion at work. In the years since, burnout has become a familiar word among helping professionals. What is less understood is how burnout can be prevented or possibly even predicted and, to both of those ends, what personality characteristics might protect against burnout in helping professionals.

Some evidence suggests that counselor self-efficacy, which refers to counselors' beliefs about their ability to perform in a particular role (Lent et al., 2006), may serve as a protective factor against burnout. To date, however, the literature has simply established that the relationship exists; what remains poorly understood is what contributes to a counselor's perceived ability to counsel effectively and what converts that perceived ability into effective therapy. The literature suggests that education, training, and experience each play a role in a counselor's perception of self-efficacy (Melchert et al., 1996); however, there may be additional elements to consider.

It can be argued that underlying counselor self-efficacy is mindset, which would help to describe why one counselor's self-efficacy is greater than another's by assessing not only their belief about their ability to perform and change but also the belief that their client has the potential for change (growth mindset) or not (fixed mindset). Additionally, a growth mindset can influence and foster grit, thereby allowing counselors to persevere when working with difficult clients and provide a sense of confidence and accomplishment that accompanies high levels of counselor self-efficacy.

Mindset and grit are relatively new terms that have been examined primarily within the domain of educational psychology, but their implications extend far beyond the classroom. This literature review will help to define and conceptualize these key constructs and provide a context for their application in the realm of counseling. This literature review is divided into four sections that include burnout, counselor self-efficacy, mindset, and grit. Past literature has stated that burnout and counselor self-efficacy are important concepts to understand and consider when battling high turnover rates, low productivity, poor client interactions, and other undesirable counseling conditions (Landrum et al., 2012). This study sought to explore what role grit and mindset play in reducing burnout and increasing counselor self-efficacy to promote successful client outcomes.

The following literature provides the foundation for the present study. For the purposes of this integrative literature review, EBSCOhost was used to search 38 databases for scholarly articles. Keywords were used to narrow results and direct the focus on primary and related constructs, which included burnout, compassion fatigue, counselor self-efficacy, mindset, grit, resiliency, and perseverance. The literature will help to outline definitions of primary constructs, explore the relationships that have been established between primary constructs, and create a context for the proposed model in the current study.

Burnout

There is an abundance of research on burnout that dates back as far as its inception. Freudenberger (1974) first introduced and defined the term, which has been most relevant to individuals in the helping professions. Individuals in these professions,

especially counseling, are particularly vulnerable to burnout due to an abundance of stressors that are common in everyday work (Lee, Cho, Kissinger, & Ogle, 2010).

Counseling is an emotionally demanding career, where counselors are repeatedly engaged with people and their problems (Kirk-Brown & Wallace, 2004) and work in demanding environments that often include high workloads, time constraints, and lack of organizational support and resources (Landrum et al., 2012). Chronic occupational stress can often lead to burnout (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). Research suggests that the qualities that make counselors effective in their work, such as empathy, compassion, and caring, are the qualities that also contribute to counselors' increased susceptibility to burnout (Thompson et al., 2014).

Over the past 40 years, burnout has been defined several different ways; however, the definitions still share a large degree of similarity. According to Lent and Schwartz (2012), burnout is a state of physical and emotional depletion at work. Burnout also has been described as an overload in demands that result in emotional exhaustion (Landrum et al., 2012). The most commonly accepted working definition of burnout was developed by Maslach and Jackson (1984), who defined it as a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job that are comprised of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Within the definition of burnout, each of these dimensions is categorized by the presentation of the following indicators: depletion of physical and emotional vigor, lack of empathy or inability to connect with clients, and lack of gratification or increased distraction at work (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). Burnout is gradual and progressive (Lee, Veach, MacFarlane, & Leroy, 2015) and is characterized predominantly by feelings of being

overextended and a lack of adequate emotional resources to cope with the stress of the work environment (Lent & Schwartz, 2012).

Burnout is increasingly viewed as a concern in the mental health field, wherein up to two-thirds of the workers may be experiencing high levels of burnout (Morse et al., 2012). According to the literature, burnout has several implications for counselors and is considered a problem that should be monitored regularly. The American Counseling Association (2014) states that counselors have a responsibility to do no harm and, therefore, should avoid practicing while symptoms of burnout are present.

Mental health work frequently demands considerable support in high-stress environments for extended periods; over time, this can result in burnout (Ray, Wong, White, & Heaslip, 2013). Clients report lower satisfaction with services when the healthcare professional is compromised due to burnout (Ray et al., 2013), which can have adverse consequences for the counselor, agency, and clients (Oser et al., 2013). Burnout can affect counselors in several areas, including physical health, mental health, and job performance (Landrum et al., 2012). Higher caseloads are typically associated with higher rates of burnout (Landrum et al., 2012), and counselors who suffer from burnout have a lower quality of life (Oser et al., 2013). Burnout can manifest in counselors in a variety of ways, including fatigue and exhaustion, insomnia, substance abuse, low self-esteem, relationship problems, anxiety, and depression (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013).

Counselor burnout is not only a personal concern for the professional who experiences it, but also has the capacity to introduce harm into the counseling relationship. Burnout can jeopardize the counselor's well-being as well as treatment

outcomes (Lee et al., 2010). Counselors who are suffering from burnout tend to have higher rates of absenteeism and more interpersonal conflict, which can result in lower productivity and decreased effectiveness (Oser et al., 2013). Rates of burnout and workplace satisfaction have an impact on client engagement (Landrum et al., 2012).

When counselors and agencies have high levels of burnout, maintaining continuity of care is difficult, and clients are less engaged in the treatment process or may withdraw from treatment entirely (Oser et al., 2013). Burnout can have numerous negative outcomes, such as poor work performance, destructive attitudes, and decreased dedication; however, the ultimate concern is a decline in the quality of services provided to clients (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). Landrum et al. (2012) have reported that burnout leads to lower client satisfaction and premature termination of treatment.

Although counseling is an emotionally and psychologically demanding career, counselors are expected to maintain poise in stressful situations and retain therapeutic quality (Lee et al., 2010). According to the American Counseling Association (2014), the primary responsibility of counselors is to respect the dignity and promote the welfare of clients. Maintaining consistent therapeutic effectiveness despite an often overwhelming work environment is often provided at the expense of the counselor's wellness (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). Counselors face a substantial challenge on a daily basis: to protect their own well-being to provide quality care to clients (Thompson et al., 2014).

There are qualities that have been shown to reduce burnout, which can include mindfulness, or being attentive to our thoughts, and compassion satisfaction (Thompson et al., 2014), which is defined as a sense of achievement (Lee et al., 2015). Other factors

that have been found to aid in the reduction of burnout include age, educational level, caseload, resources, supervision, and role expectations (Oser et al., 2013); however, these factors alone do not fully explain the reduction of burnout in some mental health professionals. Lent and Schwartz (2012) stated that these work factors begin to affect job-related self-efficacy, which can have a large impact on the relationship between the counselor and client, and eventually lead to counselor burnout.

It also has been argued that personality type may play a role in levels of counselor burnout, and specific traits, such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness, may act as natural safeguards against symptoms of burnout (Lent & Schwartz, 2012). Self-efficacy is one factor that has been explored in the counseling literature that has been indicated to play a role in protecting against counselor burnout. According to Federici and Skaalvik (2012), self-efficacy is negatively related to burnout and positively related to job satisfaction.

Counselor Self-Efficacy

The term *self-efficacy* stems from Bandura's social cognitive theory, which describes the interaction in human behavior of personal factors, behavior, and the environment (Sawyer et al., 2013). Social cognitive theorists believe that individuals set goals and expectations and control their learning and behavior to achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 1971). Specifically, self-efficacy can be defined as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Sawyer et al., 2013, p. 32). Bandura (1977) identified two primary components that play a role in self-efficacy, which include efficacy expectations and outcomes expectations. Efficacy expectations refer to the

beliefs that one holds regarding his or her ability to perform and produce desired outcomes. Outcome expectations refer to the expectancies that performing adequately will, in fact, lead to the desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977).

Four factors play a role in the facilitation of self-efficacy: successful performance, vicarious or secondary learning, support and encouragement, and reductions in emotional arousal or anxiety (Melchert et al., 1996). Bandura's social cognitive theory and self-efficacy theory are posited to play a role in counselor self-efficacy and are believed to affect counselor decision making, amount of effort exerted, persistence in adversity, and calculated risk-taking behaviors (Larson & Daniels, 1998).

Counselor self-efficacy is defined as counselors' belief about their ability to perform particular role-related behaviors (Lent et al., 2006) and their beliefs about effectively counseling a client (Larson & Daniels, 1998). This may include (but is not limited to) the counselor's capability to establish a therapeutic alliance with the client, confront and challenge the client, be emotionally present and available, and design effective interventions that serve as the framework for client change (Larson & Daniels, 1998).

Counselors' perception of self-efficacy influences the relationship between what they know how to do and what they actually do (Larson et al., 1992). Self-efficacy perceptions also can influence how much effort is put forth toward a particular goal (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). Perceptions of counselor self-efficacy is not based solely on the amount of knowledge and skill of a particular counselor but includes the expectations of how he or she will apply that knowledge and skill in situations, including those that may involve increased distress (Gündüz, 2012). It is, in a sense, a form of confidence in

not only one's base of knowledge, but also the ability to apply that knowledge and expect the desired outcome.

Counselor self-efficacy has a significant impact on the functioning and well-being of the counselor. Counselor self-efficacy is positively correlated with satisfaction and negatively correlated with anxiety (Lent, Hill, & Hoffman, 2003). Individuals' confidence level and level of self-efficacy increase as they accomplish tasks that they perceive as successful (Bandura, 1977). In turn, when self-efficacy and confidence levels are high, an individual's performance is increased (Lent et al., 2006). When counselors are experiencing symptoms of burnout, their level of functioning and effectiveness is decreased (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). Counselor self-efficacy is particularly important because it has been found to serve as a buffer against burnout (Landrum et al., 2012) and has a significant impact on client outcomes (Urbani et al., 2002).

A counselor's level of self-efficacy has an impact not only on the counselor's well-being and counseling role but also on providing effective treatment. A counselor's level of performance could be directly related to his or her level of counselor self-efficacy or the belief in his or her ability (Urbani et al., 2002). Larson and Daniels (1998) found that counselor self-efficacy has a strong positive correlation with counselor performance. Counselors with high self-efficacy perform better due to their command on the counseling process and their ability to overcome, as well as help clients overcome, obstacles in the treatment process (Lent et al., 2006). Further, higher counselor self-efficacy is associated with greater congruence between clients and counselors' perceptions of session quality (Lent et al., 2006).

Level of counselor self-efficacy does not seem to differ by sex, theoretical orientation, or race; however, differences seem to occur with training level, developmental level, and age (Larson & Daniels, 1998). Larson et al. (1992) found strong positive correlations between counselor self-efficacy and outcome expectancies across two measures of counselor self-efficacy (r = .77, .75, p < .001). Counselor self-efficacy also correlates modestly with negative and positive affect (r = -.28, .32, respectively, p < .05) (Lent et al., 2006). Self-efficacy is fluid and is affected by numerous influences. There are four primary sources that influence self-efficacy, including mastery, modeling, social persuasion, and affective arousal. All four areas are seen as places where, if the appropriate intervention occurs, counselor self-efficacy can be increased (Larson & Daniels, 1998).

Counselor self-efficacy has been upheld as one of the few reliable characteristics that could be used for selecting and training effective counselors (Urbani et al., 2002). One study found that counselor trainees with higher counselor self-efficacy perform basic counseling more skillfully than do those with lower counselor self-efficacy (Barnes, 2004). It may be problematic, however, to gauge potential performance based on counselor self-efficacy due to beginning counselors' tendency to overestimate their skill level (Urbani et al., 2002). McCarthy (2014), in a study conducted with rehabilitation counselors, found that there was no significant linear relationship between counselor self-efficacy and number of successful client outcomes. One possible explanation for this finding was that the counselors were not accurate in the assessment of their counseling skills (McCarthy, 2014).

The majority of the counseling self-efficacy literature focuses on counselors-in-training and supervision styles in relation to perceived counselor self-efficacy. There has been little to no research conducted to examine specific personality traits that contribute to increased counselor self-efficacy. The literature on counselor self-efficacy identifies characteristics that make inferences regarding the constructs of grit and mindset, such as mindfulness, self-discipline, and persistence.

The constructs of grit and mindset have not yet been applied to or examined in the counseling field, particularly in relation to counselor self-efficacy and burnout. Although no direct empirical investigations of the relationships among grit, mindset, counselor self-efficacy, and burnout have been undertaken, these constructs are expected to be related. Grit, mindset, and counselor self-efficacy all contain underlying principles of achievement motivation, tenacity in the face of adversity, and mindfulness. The mindset and grit literature in subsequent sections will seek to clearly define the terms and depict inferences of their use in the current research and the proposed model.

Mindset

Early work in the development of the mindset construct focused on people's beliefs about intelligence. Implicit theories of intelligence are views that individuals hold about intelligence as being either stagnant or malleable (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Furnham (2014) presented the incremental theory of intelligence as the belief that intelligence is not a fixed trait but, in fact, can be increased through hard work and effort. In stark contrast, the entity theory of intelligence is the belief that intelligence remains relatively stable and constant throughout an individual's life, regardless of education, experiences, or effort (Furnham, 2014).

Dweck (2006) described mindset very simplistically as "the view you adopt for yourself" (p. 6); however, mindset is anything but simple. According to Dweck (2000), there are two distinct mindsets: fixed (entity theory) and growth (incremental theory). A fixed mindset is characterized by a belief that one has only a certain amount of intelligence, static personality, and unchanging character, which leads individuals to repeatedly attempt to prove themselves or to avoid potential failures. Individuals with a fixed mindset thrive when success is certain. These individuals often choose the safest path to achievement to maintain a positive image, either for themselves or for others (or both).

A growth mindset, in contrast, is characterized by the belief that qualities, including intelligence, can be changed and cultivated through awareness, efforts, and hard work (Dweck, 2000). Individuals with a growth mindset view challenges as opportunities for growth and development, despite the potential for failure (Dweck, 2006). Individuals with a growth mindset do not perseverate on failure but, in fact, have proven to be growth-oriented, focusing on learning from previous experiences, applying the knowledge that was gained, and improving performance (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Dweck (2006) used a quote from Michael Jordan to exemplify the growth mindset:

> I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed. (p. 100)

In addition to two distinct mindsets, Dweck (2000) identifies two response patterns (mastery-oriented and helpless) to adversity or failure and two types of

achievement goals (learning and performance). A mastery-oriented response is characterized by increased focus, persistence despite adversity, and more vigorous effort to match increased difficulty. A helpless response pattern, conversely, is characterized by blaming intelligence for an inability to complete demanding tasks, deterioration of effort as difficulty increases, and loss of perspective on accomplished success (Dweck, 2000).

Performance goals involve maintaining positive judgments and preserving one's positive image (Dweck, 2000). Therefore, individuals will set goals or take on tasks that they know they can accomplish with ease to avoid any negative judgments about their attributes (Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999). Learning goals, in contrast, are specifically intended to be challenging to provoke growth and to increase skill and mastery, despite the possibility of failure (Dweck, 2000). Individuals with a growth mindset typically set learning goals and tend to have mastery-oriented responses to adversity or failure, and individuals with a fixed mindset typically set performance goals and tend to have helpless responses (Dweck, 2000).

Implicit theories, or "mindsets," have been studied considerably in the areas of social psychology and education. Mindset has been demonstrated to have significant effects on psychological functioning, especially in stressful situations (Schroder, Dawood, Yalch, Donnellan, & Moser, 2015). Dweck and Leggett (1998) found that a growth mindset is related to academic achievement; however, in a study conducted by Leondari and Gialamas (2002), no significant relationship was determined. Leondari and Gialamas found that perceived competence (self-efficacy) moderated the relationship between achievement goals and achievement outcomes.

According to Karwowski (2014), holding a fixed versus a growth mindset regarding one's abilities influences well-being, behavior, and goal attainment. The beliefs that one holds regarding his or her abilities influences how much and for how long effort is exerted toward a particular goal (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). A fixed mindset often leads individuals to lose interest or enjoyment in a task if it becomes too challenging or threatens to be a task they cannot complete, whereas, for growth-minded individuals, the harder the challenge, the more invested they become (Dweck, 2006). In other words, a fixed mindset is about perfection, and a growth mindset is about progress.

In addition to literature in the fields of social psychology and education, one article was discovered that applies implicit theories to the mental health field. Schroder et al. (2015) hypothesized that implicit theories (fixed and growth) would be associated with mental health symptoms and developed a domain-specific theory of anxiety scale to facilitate the study. Findings suggest that those with a fixed mindset regarding anxiety exhibited more symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other interpersonal problems (Schroder et al., 2015).

Federici and Skaalvik (2012) found that individuals who have high self-efficacy will embrace difficult tasks as challenges that they can learn from (growth mindset), as opposed to those who view difficulties as a threat to their capabilities and self-confidence (fixed mindset). This is particularly important in a counseling setting, where counselors often work with overwhelmingly difficult clients who may not be invested in their treatment. The counselor cannot do the work for the client, but, for change to occur, the counselor must believe that the client can change and that they have the skill set and determination to stay the course, even if the client is not fully invested in treatment.

Grit

Mindset has been studied in the social psychology field since the 1950s and has been applied to numerous settings, such as school, sports, and business (Karwowski, 2014). Similar to mindset, grit has been shown to predict achievement in school, sports, and military settings (Von Culin et al., 2014); however, as mentioned, neither construct has been applied to or examined in the counseling field.

Grit is defined as passion and perseverance for long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007) and has two related but distinct factors: effort and interest (Von Culin et al., 2014). Kelly, Matthews, and Bartone (2014) defined grit as an unswerving, sustained, and passionate pursuit of a given interest or goal. Grit has been advanced as one of the most important factors toward success in life (Tough, 2013); however, the literature on counselor burnout and counselor self-efficacy has failed to address this important factor. Grit can be thought of as a character strength that reflects one's capacity for resilience, self-discipline, and persistence over time despite challenges, failures, and plateaus in progress (Duckworth et al., 2007). Grit differs from resiliency with its focus on longevity and persistence over time rather than on short-term intensity (Duckworth et al., 2007). Grit, in essence, is the determination to work diligently and persist through inevitable adversity to accomplish long-term goals without losing interest or willpower, with little regard for the possibility of failure.

Duckworth et al. (2007) found that individual differences in grit accounted for variance in success outcomes over and beyond IQ and the Big Five personality factors. Individuals who are equally talented or have a similar skillset may vary in grit and, therefore, vary in their amount of success in a given area. Gritty individuals tend to

pursue long-term goals without changing course, concentrate more effort in one particular area, and complete tasks in their entirety (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Gritty individuals persist even when it may be easier to give up or switch directions (Lucas, Gratch, Cheng, & Marsella, 2015). Grit has been shown to protect against divorce, job loss (including in education and business professions), leaving the military, and dropping out of school (Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014). An individual's effort and persistence in overcoming difficulties may lead to the promotion of a more positive mindset and greater self-efficacy (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). Grit has been found to increase with one's age (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015), which is notable in the context of the present study, as more years of experience in the mental health field is typically associated with less reported burnout (Thompson et al., 2014). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that there is a link between grit, counselor burnout, and age or years of experience in the field. One explanation is that gritty counselors experience less burnout and stay committed to the field longer.

In the literature, the important connection between grit and mindset is in its infancy and is in need of further development. Duckworth and Eskreis-Winkler (2013) found a moderate, positive relationship between grit and growth mindset. The relationship is important due to its implication that grit is malleable and has the potential to be cultivated and developed. Having or developing a growth mindset could develop grit (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015).

Grit has shown promise as a protective factor against suffering negative outcomes in the face of adversity. Therefore, it is important to examine its transferability to the counseling field. There is a gap in the literature that fails to address the factors that

greatly influence counselor self-efficacy beyond education, experience, and training, as well as a gap that fails to address less traditional factors that may influence counselor burnout. Through this literature, the problem of burnout has been clearly identified, and its impact on counselors and clients has been explained. A relationship has been established between counselor burnout and counselor self-efficacy, with self-efficacy's acting as a bridge to incorporate the new constructs in this model. In sum, the promising outcomes regarding success and achievement of mindset and grit have been well established in the research literature.

Grounded in the literature, the current study bridges identified gaps through a process model that includes potential protective factors that may prove more effective than do traditionally identified factors in increasing counselor self-efficacy and decreasing counselor burnout. Given that the literature suggests a likely effect of mindset on grit, and a relationship between grit and self-efficacy, in the proposed model of the current research, grit acts as a partial mediator between mindset and levels of counselor self-efficacy.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

There has been little research on character strengths that protect against burnout. To this end, the psychological constructs of grit and mindset show considerable promise as potential protective factors against counselor burnout, as they promote increased levels of counselor self-efficacy. The current study examined the following research questions: (1) To what extent does counselor self-efficacy predict reduced burnout? (2) Does mindset and grit affect counselor self-efficacy? and (3) To what extent is the relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy mediated through grit?

Research Design

This is the first known study to transition the study of the constructs of grit and mindset from traditional educational settings to the field of counseling. This study sought to explore whether relationships exist among these constructs and, if so, the strength of their relationships. It was, therefore, fitting to conduct a quantitative study to gather primary data, using an online survey method. The principal focus was to use existing scales that have demonstrated strong reliability and validity to gain information on how the variables of grit and growth mindset relate to counselor self-efficacy and burnout. A process model is presented in this research to demonstrate the hypothesized relationship between the constructs.

Participants

The focus of this research was to investigate whether the constructs of grit and growth mindset are applicable in the realm of counseling and have any relationship to counselor-self-efficacy and burnout. Since this study aimed to explore the work of practicing counselors, the sample consisted of self-identified professional counselors who

were at least 18 years of age and had some post-training clinical experience (i.e., counseling experience beyond practicum or internship) in the counseling field. Participants were classified into three groups: (a) novice counselors, less than one year of post-training clinical experience; (b) advanced counselors, one to 10 years of experience; and (c) experienced counselors, more than 10 years of experience in the field.

To properly address the research questions and represent these groups, the researcher ensured that there was variability among participants in number of years of experience in working in the field. These groups were established based on the idea that level of experience in the field influences the strength of and ability to form a therapeutic alliance (Mallinckrodt & Nelson, 1991), which, in turn, may be related to the constructs under investigation. Differences in counselor self-efficacy seem to occur with training level (Larson & Daniels, 1998). To reduce the effect of this confounding variable and to ensure that the focus remained on the constructs intended to be measured in the current study, the researcher controlled for years of professional experience throughout all analyses.

Counseling is a rapidly growing field. According to the American Counseling Association (2016), there are currently more than 56,000 professional members, and there are thousands more counselors who are not members of this professional counseling organization, far more than could have been included in the current study. A power analysis was conducted to ensure an adequate sample size to represent this population of practicing counselors. The parameters set for the power analysis included an adjusted significance level ($\alpha = 0.01$) to account for multiple correlations' being tested; power ($\beta = 0.80$); and an estimated anticipated effect size ($r = 0.30$) to reflect the commonplace

small-to-medium effect sizes found in the literature on grit, mindset, self-efficacy, and burnout (Bresó, Schaufeli, & Salanova, 2011; Etzion, Eden, & Lapidot, 1998; Fernet, Guay, & Senécal, 2004). Based on the power analysis, the current study aimed for a sample of 125 participants who met the outlined criteria. Participants were recruited through the Counselor Education and Supervision Network Listserv (CESNET-L), which has over 3,000 subscribers at any given time, as well as the American Counseling Association's LinkedIn page.

Instrumentation

In the current study, four established instruments were employed to measure the constructs of grit, mindset, counselor self-efficacy, and burnout. Each measure was chosen based on the narrow focus of their targeted variables, the overall quality of their psychometrics, and the clarity and convenience of their format. Demographic information was obtained at the beginning of the survey, which included age, gender, race/ethnicity, area of counseling, professional title, highest level of education, and number of years working in the field (Appendix A). In total, the Qualtrics survey in the current study was composed of 57 questions that included the following: seven demographic questions, eight questions that measured grit, seven that measured mindset, 25 that measured counselor self-efficacy, and 10 that measured burnout.

Mindset

The independent variable in the proposed process model was mindset. There is no singular, well-established measure of mindset that is universally employed in survey research on the construct; thus, in the present study, mindset was measured through two of the implicit theory measures: Theory of Intelligence Measure and Theory of

Personality Measure (Dweck et al., 1995). Both of these measures have been used in numerous studies (e.g., Dweck et al., 1995, Schroder et al., 2015) to identify whether individuals have a fixed or growth mindset. However, as no previous study had investigated mindset with counselors, it was difficult to know whether one or the other would have been better suited for the present work; thus, both were employed.

Mindset can be assessed on one specific domain (e.g., intelligence, morality, anxiety) or can be examined more broadly. For the current research, the specific domain of counseling skill was included as well as the broader theory of personality measure. To address the former, a four-item adapted version of the construct-specific Theory of Intelligence Measure was used. The items were specifically adapted to meet the needs of the current study; i.e., in each question, *intelligence* had been replaced with *counseling skill*.

The four items that comprises this measure includes: (a) "You have a certain amount of counseling skill and you really can't do much to change it"; (b) "Your counseling skill is something about you that you can't change very much"; (c) "To be honest, you cannot really change how skillful you are in counseling"; and (d) "You can learn new things, but you can't really change your basic counseling skill." Items were scored using a 6-point scale, indicating how strongly the participants agreed or disagreed with each statement. Higher scores (4.0 and above) indicated a growth mindset, and lower scores (3.0 and below) indicated a fixed mindset. Typically, only clear theories were included, and any scores that fell between 3.0 and 4.0 were excluded.

The theory of personality measure was included to get a more well-rounded idea of an individuals' orientation of a fixed or growth mindset. The items on the theory of

personality measure included: (a) “The kind of person someone is, is something very basic about them, and it can’t be changed very much”; (b) “People can do things differently, but the important parts of who they are can’t really be changed”; and (c) “Everyone is a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that” (Dweck et al., 1995). The scales and scoring were the same as the Theory of Intelligence Measure. The authors report a Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of .94 to .98 for the Theory of Intelligence Measure and .90 to .96 for the Theory of Personality Measure. The test-retest reliability over a two-week period was .80 for the Theory of Intelligence Measure and .82 for the Theory of Personality Measure. In accordance with Dweck et al., due to strong suggestibility in prior studies, items that depict incremental theory were not included in the measures. Two validation studies were conducted with think-aloud protocols to test response processes. Respondents who disagreed with the fixed mindset questions gave clear growth-minded justification. In the validation studies, factor analyses were performed to protect against acquiescence bias for entity (fixed) mindset questions (Dweck et al., 1995).

Counselor Self-Efficacy

Counselor self-efficacy was the primary dependent variable in the proposed mediation process model and was measured using the Counselor Activity Self-Efficacy Scale (CASES; Lent et al., 2003). The CASES is a 41-item instrument that uses self-efficacy indexes ranging from 0 to 9, with higher scores’ indicating stronger confidence in one’s counseling capabilities. The scale uses the three labels of “no confidence at all,” “some confidence,” and “complete confidence” to describe response options.

The CASES has six subscales that address three primary domains, including helping skill efficacy, session management, and counseling challenges self-efficacy (Lent et al., 2006). For the current study, counselor self-efficacy was measured using four of the six scales that addressed two of the three domains from the CASES. The additional domain that captures specific client challenges was not relevant for the current study. The CASES had a Cronbach's alpha of .97 for the entire scale, and subscales ranged from .79 to .94 (Lent et al., 2003). In addition, a two-week test-retest reliability showed stability over time. Intercorrelations among the CASES scales were medium to large, ranging from .44 to .72.

The current study focused on the two domains of helping skill self-efficacy and session management. The four scales that addressed these two domains were exploration skills (α = .79), insight skills (α = .85), action skills (α = .83), and session management (α = .94; Lent et al., 2003). A total of 25 questions comprised the four scales that were used in the current study.

It is worth noting that the Counseling Self-Estimate Inventory (COSE; Larson et al., 1992) was considered for use in this study, but ultimately decided against. Even though COSE is one of the most widely used instruments and reports adequate reliability and validity estimates, it was developed primarily for use with counselor trainees. The current study focused on counselors who are active in the field and vary in years of experience, not counselors-in-training; therefore, it was decided that COSE would not be an appropriate measure for the current study.

Burnout

In addition to the proposed mediation process model, the relationship between counselor self-efficacy and counselor burnout was examined. The literature has provided evidence for an established relationship and a framework for the exploration of this relationship in the current study. The strength and direction of the relationship between counselor self-efficacy and burnout was examined while controlling for mindset and grit.

Burnout, the dependent variable of the full model, was measured by the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) burnout subscale. The ProQOL manual (2005) defines burnout as feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in dealing with work. Developed by Stamm in 1995 and revised several times, the current version is the ProQOL 5 (Stamm, 2010), a 30-item self-report inventory that focuses primarily on two major areas of impact on helpers in the counseling profession: compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue has two subscales, measuring burnout and secondary trauma. The 30-item instrument is comprised of a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = very often) that reflects how frequently a counselor has experienced a certain feeling in the last 30 days. For the current study, only the 10 questions that comprise the burnout subscale were included, and the burnout score was obtained by summing the items. Stamm (2005) established the mean score on the burnout subscale as 50 (*SD* = 10), with a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .75. The ProQOL is free, and permission for its use is given through the website (ProQOL.org).

This instrument was chosen because it was developed specifically for use with counselors. Many other burnout inventories exist; however, their targeted populations

tend to be more generalized to "helping professions" and not specifically to counselors. One burnout inventory that is used frequently is the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS; Lee et al., 2010), which address all three identified aspects of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) and provides some insight into symptoms of burnout, but falls short for this study due to its inability to address counselor burnout specifically.

Grit

In addition to the above independent and dependent variables, one mediator variable was considered. In the proposed mediation model, the relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy is partially mediated by grit. That is, changes in mindset affect levels of grit, which, in turn, affect counselor self-efficacy. The mediator variable can determine the extent to which the relationship between the major variables is influenced by secondary factors. In this study, the mediator variable of grit was included.

Grit was measured through the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), which is an economical measure of perseverance and passion for long-term goals. The Grit-S contains only eight questions compared to its original 12-question full-length instrument but has been found to be equally reliable and valid. The Grit-S maintains the two-factor structure of the original Grit Scale, which includes Consistency of Interest and Perseverance of Effort, which are strongly intercorrelated (r = .59; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

The Grit-S was developed and validated through six studies and included various samples, including adolescents, adults, and military cadets at the West Point United States Military Academy. The Grit-S has a one-year test-retest reliability coefficient of r

= .68 and internal consistency, ranging from α = .73 to .83 for the Consistency of Interest subscale and .60 to .78 for the Perseverance of Effort subscale across four samples (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Validity was demonstrated through correlations with other related constructs, including the NEO Personality Inventory and the Big Five personality measure; effect sizes ranged from r = .37–.47 among test groups.

Procedure

The 57-question survey was distributed through CESNET-L and the American Counseling Association's LinkedIn page. The email to potential participants contained a brief description of the research study and an embedded link to the survey. The first request for participation was sent out upon IRB approval. Two follow-up requests were sent out in one-week increments, totaling three email requests for participation. All data were collected, and the survey was closed four weeks after initially being made available. Prior to starting the survey, all participants were asked to read and respond "agree" to the statement of consent to participate in this research study. If a participant did not click "agree" to certify their consent, they were not able to proceed with the survey.

Participants had the opportunity to enter their email addresses at the end of the survey to gain entry into a lottery for up to $225 in gift cards to Amazon.com. An early-entry drawing for one $75 gift card was drawn one week after the opening date of the survey. A second drawing for the remaining two $75 gift cards occurred upon completion of the data collection. Early-entry participants (those who completed the survey within the first week) were included in both drawings. All participants were made aware on the consent form that their e-mail addresses remained confidential and were not connected to their survey data. Email addresses were used only to notify the participants

who had won the drawing. Email addresses were not used for any other type of communication with the participants, unless participants contacted the researcher with questions or concerns related to the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants followed a link to complete the survey on the Qualtrics website, and, once surveys were completed, data were collected and stored in the Qualtrics system under a password-protected user account held by the researcher. Qualtrics does not gather any identifying information, such as names or email addresses, and a login is not required to complete an existing survey. IP addresses are collected by the system so that surveys can be stopped while still in progress and continued by participants at a later time. Qualtrics servers are protected by high-end firewall systems; vulnerability scans are performed regularly, and complete penetration tests are performed yearly. All services have quick failover points and redundant hardware, and complete backups are performed nightly. Surveys and data were available only to the researcher and the researcher's advisor.

Data from scales that measured grit, mindset, counselor self-efficacy, and burnout were evaluated using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses (e.g., correlations, multiple regression) in SPSS statistical software. To test Research Question 1, the researcher calculated a correlation to examine the relationship between counselor self-efficacy and burnout. To assess Research Question 2, the researcher conducted two additional correlation analyses: (a) grit and counselor self-efficacy and (b) mindset and counselor self-efficacy. Significant results from these two correlation analyses represented two of the three conditions necessary to test for mediation (Baron & Kenny,

1986), which was the focus of Research Question 3. Thus, prior to addressing research question 3, the researcher ran one additional correlation between mindset and grit.

In accordance with the established steps for mediation testing presented by Baron and Kenny (1986), significant relationships between each pair of variables needed to be established before examining mediation. If these conditions all hold in the predicted direction, a regression analysis including the independent variable (mindset), dependent variable (counselor self-efficacy), and prospective mediator (grit) is conducted. If the relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy is reduced in the presence of (i.e., controlling for) grit, relative to the direct correlation of mindset and counselor self-efficacy (found in the previous analysis from Research Question 2), then evidence of mediation has been provided.

Partial mediation occurs when the relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy is significantly reduced but still statistically significant. Perfect mediation holds if mindset has no statistically significant relationship with counselor self-efficacy when controlling for grit. The presence of significant mediation (i.e., reduction of the statistical relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy when controlling for grit, relative to the direct correlation of mindset and counselor self-efficacy) was tested for, using the Sobel test (an online calculator found at http://quantpsy.org/sobel/sobel.htm).

Demographic information was used to describe the sample and analyzed to ensure that it did not act as an additional significant variable. If any demographic variables were significantly correlated with any of the central variables of study, the above analyses that

tested the research questions would have been re-run, with these demographic variables included as covariates.

Human Participants and Ethics Precautions

The ethical considerations in the current study are limited; however, confidentiality is always a concern when handling sensitive topics. To guarantee confidentiality, the researcher ensured that participants' names, places of employment, and other identifying data did not appear on the survey instrument at any time. Participants had the right to withdraw at any point prior to completion of the survey without penalty and could do so simply by exiting out of the survey. If participants chose to withdraw prior to the completion of the survey, those answers were not included in the final analysis. Upon completion, participants no longer had the ability to withdraw due to the anonymous nature of the survey. In other words, there was no way to associate a participant with his or her survey; thus, those specific data were unable to be removed. Responses appeared only in statistical data summaries. There were no foreseeable risks to participants, but a possible benefit included the opportunity to reflect on their attitudes regarding themselves and their clients, which could have been beneficial for professional growth and development. All procedures have been approved by the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (Appendix B).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This section contains the results of the data collection and analysis for the research study. The demographic profile of the participants as well as the statistical analysis of outlined research questions are presented. Non-significant and significant results are identified. Data were collected through an online Qualtrics survey and analyzed using SPSS statistical software. Within the data collection period, 164 surveys were started and 148 surveys completed, totaling a 90% completion rate among those who started the survey. Due to the nature of the recruitment approach (i.e., solicitation via listservs and social media), it is not possible to know what percentage of those invited to complete the survey actually did so. Out of the 148 surveys collected, 12 could not be included in the final analysis due to incomplete data. After removing the cases where the survey was incomplete, the researcher had a final sample that included 136 participants. Some analyses, as identified in the reporting of the statistics in this chapter, contain only 132 participants due to missing data (listwise deletion in these cases was employed).

Research Questions

Three primary research questions were examined in this study: (1) To what extent does counselor self-efficacy predict reduced burnout? (2) Does mindset and grit affect counselor self-efficacy? and (3) To what extent is the relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy mediated through grit? Four instruments—Grit-S, Theory of Intelligence Measure (adapted to address counseling skill), CASES, and the ProQOL burnout subscale—were used to examine the relationships between the four primary variables under investigation in these research questions.

Participant Demographic Data

There were 136 participants in the study. Seven demographic questions were included at the beginning of the survey to describe the makeup of the sample (Appendix A). The sample consisted of 106 females (78%), 29 males (21%), and 1 participant who did not disclose. Of the participants, 80 (59%) identified as married or in a domestic partnership, 45 (33%) identified as never married, and 11 (8%) identified as divorced. Five participants did not provide their marital status. The age range of the sample was 23–72; for simplification in reporting, ages were condensed into four categories. A total of 70 (51%) were between the ages of 23 to 33; 39 (28.6%) were between the ages of 34 and 44; 12 (8.8%) were between the ages of 45 and 55; and 13 (9.5%) were over 55 years of age. Two participants chose not to disclose their age.

Participants also were asked to include their race/ethnicity. A total of 118 (86.8%) identified as Caucasian, 9 (6.6%) as African American, 5 (3.7%) as Asian/Pacific Islander, 3 (2.2%) as Hispanic or Latino, 1 as Native American or American Indian, 1 as Middle Eastern, and 1 as Scandinavian.

The final three demographic questions focused on education, area of expertise, and years of post-training experience. Highest level of education varied among participants. The sample included 14 with a bachelor's degree, 31 with a master's degree, 30 with a doctorate, 22 with a master's degree and a national certification, 28 with a master's degree and a state license, and 11 individuals who identified as "other." Most individuals who selected "other" identified as being currently enrolled in a graduate program or in the process of obtaining a license or certification.

Participants also varied in their specific areas of counseling expertise. The sample included 74 (54.4%) mental health counselors, 29 (21.3%) school counselors, 11 (8.1%) substance abuse counselors, 9 (6.6%) marriage and family counselors, 5 (3.7%) career counselors, and 8 (5.9%) counselors who identified in another specific area of counseling. Counselors who selected "other" were encouraged to manually enter their particular area of counseling; responses included rehabilitation counseling, crisis counseling, college counseling/student affairs, and counselor education.

The final demographic question focused on number of years of clinical experience beyond a training program. A total of 23 participants had less than one year of post-training clinical experience (novice counselors), 85 had one to 10 years of experience (advanced counselors), and 28 participants had more than 10 years of post-training clinical experience (experienced counselors). As noted, whereas there is little suggestion that any of the demographic variables are likely to influence the relationships among the variables under investigation, the literature also indicates that a relationship exists between number of years' experience and counselor self-efficacy (Larson & Daniels, 1998), with years of experience having a potential relationship to burnout, grit, and mindset. Thus, in all analyses, number of years' experience was controlled for.

Findings

The online Qualtrics survey was composed of four separate instruments: The ProQOL burnout subscale, Grit-S, Theory of Intelligence Measure, and CASES. Prior to the participants' answering the research questions, the reliability of the items that comprised each instrument, i.e., grit, burnout, mindset, and counselor self-efficacy, was examined using the present data.

Grit

The Grit-S originally consisted of eight items and produced a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .79. However, there was a very low inter-item correlation (r = .11) for the item "Setbacks don't discourage me." Even though the instrument had sufficient reliability, this one item seemed problematic in other analyses (e.g., contributed to the attenuation of the correlations among grit and the other variables) and, therefore, was removed. The new seven-item grit scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .83. Counselors in this study reported fairly high grit scores across the sample. Scores ranged from 1.57 to 5.00 (M = 3.80, SD = 0.61).

Burnout

The ProQOL burnout subscale consisted of 10 items, five of them reverse-coded. The scale had sufficient internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of .79. Burnout scores among the sample ranged from 1 to 3.4 (M = 2.14, SD = 0.51).

Mindset

The Theory of Intelligence Measure consisted of four items; the scale had a high level of internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .88. Mindset scores ranged from 1 to 3 (M = 2.22, SD = 0.72).

The Implicit Person Theories Measure also had a high level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .89. However, the response pattern among participants was unusual. The researcher attributed this phenomenon to the wording of the scale's not being changed to be counselor specific, which likely compromised the validity of the measure for the present purposes. This scale was, therefore, not used in the final analyses.

Counselor Self-Efficacy

The CASES included 25 items and had high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value of .94. The counselors in this sample reported fairly high counselor self-efficacy. Scores ranged from 5.84 to 9.92 (M = 8.30, SD = 0.89).

In addition to examining reliability, the researcher produced a histogram to assess the distribution of responses for each scale. Participant responses for grit had a skewness of -.46 (SE = .21) and kurtosis of .25 (SE = .41). Counselor self-efficacy had a skewness of -.37 (SE = .21) and kurtosis of -.16 (SE = .42). Burnout had a skewness of .34 (SE = .21) and kurtosis of -.42 (SE = .41). Mindset had a skewness of 1.48 (SE=.21) and kurtosis of 2.40 (SE =.42). None of the scales showed significant outliers; however, each of the scales appears to violate the normality assumption with significant skewness in the more favorable direction.

Three of the scales (grit, counselor self-efficacy, and burnout) demonstrated skewness that was acceptable given the robustness to this violation of the correlation and the regression analyses run in the present study (see Bulmer, 1979, who first presented the rule of thumb that skewness between 1 and -1 is generally acceptable). However, the mindset scale was extremely positively skewed, requiring attention prior to including it in any analyses.

Out of the 136 participants in the current study, only five would have been identified as having a fixed-oriented mindset (i.e., mindset scores above 4). To satisfy the assumption of normal distribution and to more accurately represent the sample given the minimal prevalence of fixed mindset, the researcher recoded data into groups that described levels of growth mindset. Participants with scores ranging from 1 to 1.25 were

recoded as "3," indicating a high level of growth mindset; 1.5 to 2.25 were recoded as "2," indicating a medium level of growth mindset; and 2.5 to 6 were recoded as "1," indicating a low-to-zero level of growth mindset. Fifty-three participants were identified as having a high level of growth mindset, 58 participants were identified as having a medium level of growth mindset, and 23 participants were identified as having a low level of growth mindset (Figure 2).

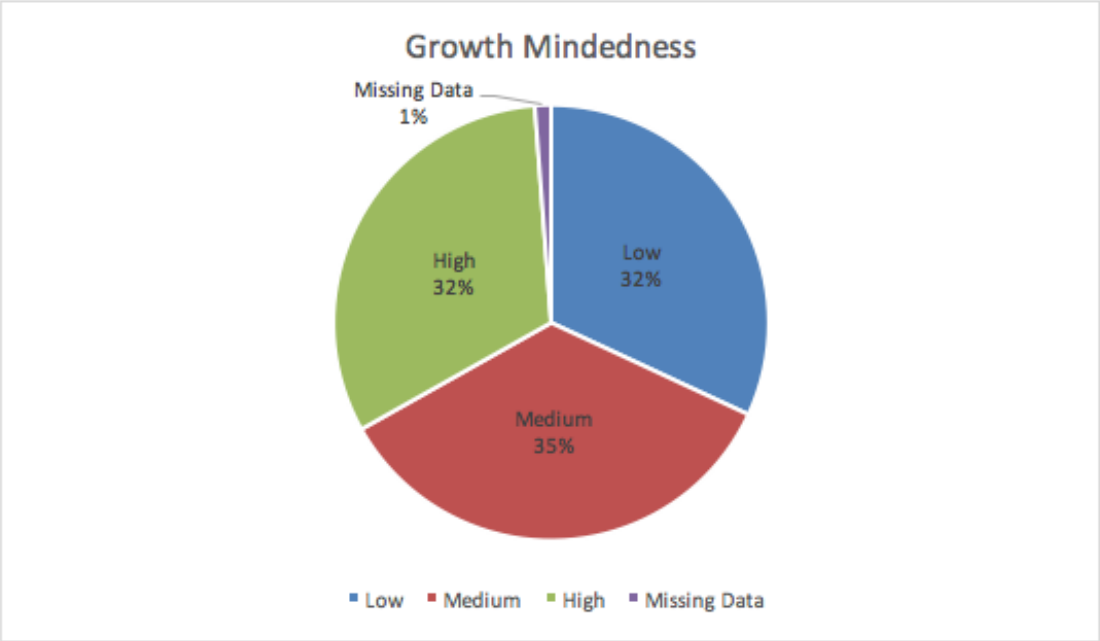


Figure 2. Distribution of recategorized levels of growth mindset.

Results of Analyses

Research Question 1

The first research question, *To what extent does counselor self-efficacy predict reduced burnout?* was answered by correlating the responses on the ProQOL burnout scale with the responses on the CASES while controlling for years of experience. The relationship between counselor self-efficacy and burnout is a moderate-to-strong negative

relationship ($r(132) = -.42$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher self-efficacy is fairly strongly associated with lower burnout scores.

Research Question 2

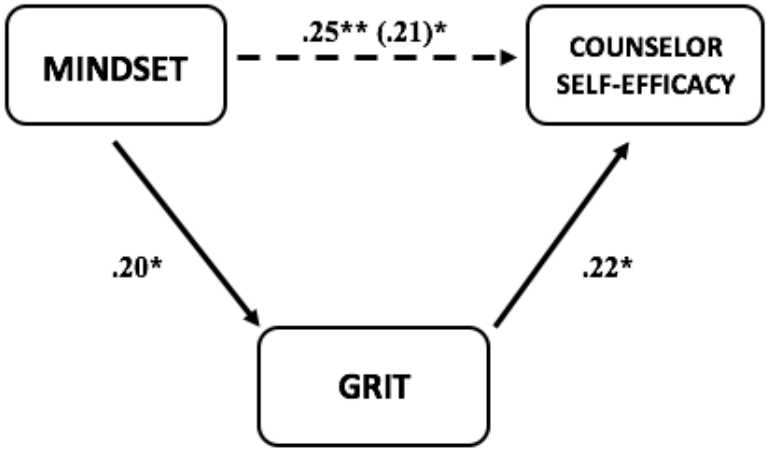
The second research question, *Does mindset and grit affect counselor self-efficacy?* was answered by correlating the responses on the Theory of Intelligence Measure with the responses on the CASES as well as correlating the responses on the Grit-S scale with responses on the CASES, while controlling for years of experience for both analyses. The correlation between mindset and counselor self-efficacy is a small-to-moderate positive relationship ($r(132) = .25$, $p = .005$), indicating that a higher growth mindset is associated with higher self-efficacy. The correlation between the grit scores and responses on the Counselor Activity Self-Efficacy Scale also indicate a small-to-moderate positive relationship ($r(132) = .22$, $p = .012$).

Prior to addressing Research Question 3, the researcher analyzed one additional correlation, which was required to be significant to satisfy all of the requirements to test for mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The responses on the mindset measure were correlated with the grit scores while controlling for years of experience. The results indicated a small-to-moderate positive correlation ($r(132) = .20$, $p = .022$). Significant correlations between all variables indicate that the assumptions are satisfied and mediation can be tested.

Research Question 3

This research question was: *To what extent is the relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy mediated through grit?* As noted above, prior to testing for mediation, significant relationships between each pair of variables needed to be

established (Figure 3). After confirming this condition was satisfied, a correlation was conducted to examine whether grit mediates the relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy. A partial correlation between mindset and counselor self-efficacy (while controlling for grit and years of experience) was conducted. The correlation was modestly reduced but still significant ($r(132) = .21$, $p = .016$). To determine whether the mediation was significant, the researcher conducted a Sobel Test, the results of which indicated that the mediation was not statistically significant ($z' = 1.57$, $p = 0.117$). In the figure, the partial correlation between mindset and counselor self-efficacy controlling for grit (and years of experience) is in parentheses.



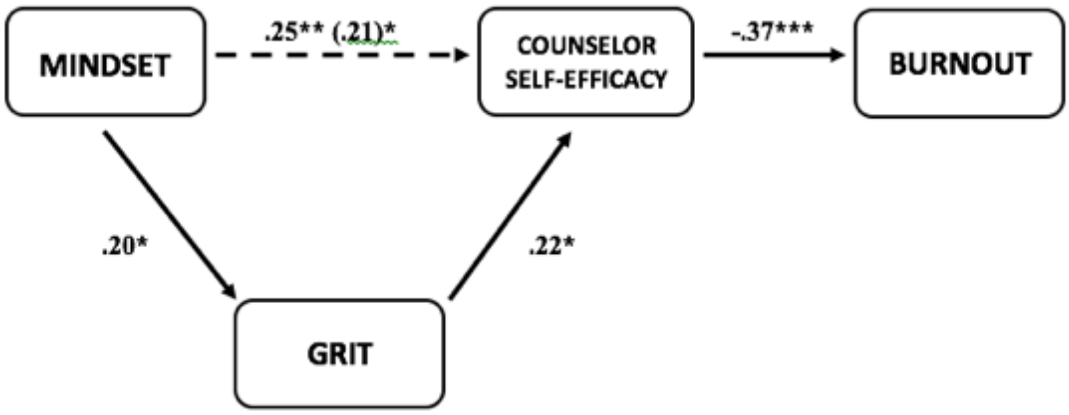
*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Figure 3. Partial correlations for the relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy as mediated by grit, controlling for years of experience.

Full Model of Relationships among Mindset, Grit, Counselor Self-Efficacy, and Burnout

To better understand how the relationship of counselor self-efficacy and burnout (explored in the first research question) functions with consideration of the potential influences of mindset and grit, the researcher tested the full model using the "enter"

method (i.e., simultaneous entry) in a linear regression model. To test the full model, the researcher identified burnout as the dependent variable, and the additional variables (grit, mindset, and counselor self-efficacy) were included as independent variables. The focal relationship in this regression model that adds to the understanding of the full model in the context of this study is that of counselor self-efficacy and burnout. The model R^2 value was .19, indicating that these three independent variables account for 19% of variance, and significantly predicted burnout scores (b = 4.339, $t(131) = 10.214$, $p <$ .001). The only statistically significant predictor of burnout was counselor self-efficacy (β = -.37, $p < .001$).



*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Figure 4. Results of the full model regression analysis, with standardized beta coefficients reported.

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes the summary of an investigation of the relationship among mindset, grit, counselor self-efficacy, and counselor burnout; the chapter has four parts. The first section provides a brief review of the study and revisits pertinent literature. The second section presents a discussion of the results obtained in this study in relation to the identified research questions and implications for the results. The third section contains limitations of this particular study. The fourth and final section presents recommendations and future directions for research.

Summary

Counseling is a field where stress, high caseloads, and intense working environments often contribute to high turnover rates, low productivity, poor client interactions, and other undesirable outcomes (Landrum et al., 2012). As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, burnout is a struggle faced by many counselors and can have serious consequences for both the counselor and client if not recognized and addressed. The American Counseling Association (2014) stated that counselors should not practice while symptoms of burnout are present; however, up to two-thirds of mental health workers may be experiencing burnout (Morse et al., 2012). The purpose of this study was to examine how mindset and grit influence counselor self-efficacy and ultimately affect counselor burnout.

Grounded in the literature, a mediation model was presented as the hypothesized framework for understanding relationships among the variables. As discussed in Chapter 2, research suggests a growth mindset promotes grit, and both grit and mindset promote self-efficacy. Therefore, the theorized mediation model design postulated that the

relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy would be partially mediated by grit. The number of years of clinical experience was the only demographic variable that the literature suggested had an established relationship with the other variables in the study (in particular, counselor self-efficacy; Larson & Daniels, 1998). Therefore, it was statistically controlled for throughout all analyses to remove its potential influence on the results.

The study was conducted through an anonymous online survey and was composed of four well-established, psychometrically sound instruments. The four instruments included the Grit-S, Theory of Intelligence Measure (adapted to address counseling skill), CASES, and the burnout subscale of the ProQOL measure. Participants also were asked a set of seven demographic questions at the beginning of the survey. Of the participants recruited, 136 were included in final analyses. All participants were self-identified counselors with at least some degree of post-training clinical experience. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS statistical software to answer the three primary research questions. The next section will provide a detailed discussion and interpretation as well as implications of the results outlined in Chapter 4.

Discussion and Implications

The current study further contributes to the already established relationship of counselor self-efficacy and burnout. The relationship between counselor self-efficacy and burnout provided the foundation for this study, based on the prevalent literature that outlined its significance in the field of counseling. Counselors are especially vulnerable to burnout due to an abundance of stressors that are common in everyday work (S. M. Lee et al., 2010). Burnout has been and continues to be a major concern among

counselors, and evidence is accumulating that counselor self-efficacy is one of the leading safeguards against burnout. Counselor self-efficacy has a significant impact on client outcomes (Urbani et al., 2002) and has been found to serve as a buffer against burnout (Landrum et al., 2012).

Beyond years of experience, the literature has heretofore not identified many factors that influence counselor self-efficacy. This study sought to examine whether mindset and grit affect counselor self-efficacy due to their promising outcomes in the educational psychology literature on internal motivational factors and success outcomes. The mindset construct had never been examined in counselors prior to this study. Therefore, it was presented exactly as it has been in studies that examined other populations, including teachers, students, and athletes, as "fixed" or "growth." Interestingly, the mindset variable produced extremely skewed results in this study.

This finding was of particular interest due to its implication that the vast majority of counselors have a growth-oriented mindset. Out of the 136 participants in the current study, only 5 (3.6%) would have been identified as having a fixed-oriented mindset. Due to the statistical assumptions of the correlation and regression analyses run in this study, it was necessary to redistribute and recode the results for this variable to reflect variations in growth-oriented mindsets: low-to-zero growth-oriented mindset, medium growth-oriented mindset, and high growth-oriented mindset. One conclusion that can be drawn is that counselors, by their very nature, are more likely to be growth oriented and may be drawn to the field by that facet of their personality, much as engineers are predominantly analytic and self-select into their field as a result.

Grit was an additional personality characteristic that was examined due to implications in the literature that it is related to self-efficacy, along with the literature that suggested that mindset influences grit. As discussed in Chapter 2, grit differs from resiliency in its emphasis on long-term endurance (Duckworth et al., 2007) and involves having deep commitments that one remains devoted to over time (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015).

Research Question 1 was: *To what extent does counselor self-efficacy predict reduced burnout?* The findings in this study support what has been outlined in the literature regarding the relationship between counselor self-efficacy and burnout. This study provided further evidence that counselor self-efficacy and burnout have a strong inverse relationship ($r = -.42$, $p < .001$), meaning that higher self-efficacy is associated with lower counselor burnout and lower self-efficacy, with higher counselor burnout. Counselor self-efficacy is defined as counselors' belief about their ability to perform particular role-related behaviors (Lent et al., 2006) and their beliefs about effectively counseling a client (Larson & Daniels, 1998). Therefore, it is not surprising that, on average, as this internal belief regarding one's abilities decreases, symptoms of burnout increase.

Research Question 2 was: *Does mindset and grit affect counselor self-efficacy?* Results of the correlation indicated that both mindset and grit contribute to counselor self-efficacy, with correlations of $r = .25$, $p = .005$ and $r = .22$, $p = .012$, respectively. The effect sizes are too small to draw strong inferences about these relationships, although the statistical significance of these finding indicate that there is a relationship

present. There is more left to be discovered regarding these relationships, which will be discussed in the Recommendations section.

Research Question 3 was: *To what extent is the relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy mediated through grit?* The design of the mediation model was grounded in the limited amount of literature available regarding how the mindset and grit constructs interact with one another. The results of the study suggest that they do, in fact, independently relate to counselor self-efficacy; however, the results of the mediation process model that was proposed were not clear. The correlation between mindset and counselor self-efficacy (controlling for years of experience) was reduced when controlling for grit, indicating that grit may have contributed some influence on the original correlation between mindset and counselor self-efficacy. However, the Sobel test indicated that the correlation was not reduced enough to reflect a statistically significant mediation ($z' = 1.57$, $p = 0.117$).

The literature regarding the relationship between mindset and grit is still in its infancy. Therefore, it is possible that the model proposed in this study is not the most accurate representation of the interaction between these variables and counselor self-efficacy. Instead of mediation, it is possible that *moderation* is occurring (i.e., that grit moderates the relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy, or perhaps even that mindset moderates the relationship between grit and counselor self-efficacy). A moderator is a variable that alters the direction or strength of the relationship between a predictor and an outcome (Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004). Alternatively, it may be the case that there is no specific directional sequence in which these variables interact (i.e., their relations may be bidirectional), and that the only evidence that could be produced

from a study such as the present one is that they are independent and potentially equally important contributors to counselor self-efficacy.

Additionally, it is possible that a larger sample size would have been able to provide clearer results of mediation (or a lack thereof). Thus, there is not sufficient evidence produced by the present work to indicate that this model does or does not provide an operational explanation of the relationships among these three variables. The significant findings outlined in the first two research questions suggest that there are important relationships among these constructs; however, this study failed to provide adequate statistical evidence to support the proposed mediation model.

Nevertheless, this study provides an important contribution in that it bridges a gap between well-established constructs in the counseling field (counselor self-efficacy and burnout) and two promising constructs that are being studied in the education and psychology literature (mindset and grit) that have been shown to play a significant role in motivation and success outcomes. It brings to light personality characteristics that research is beginning to demonstrate have an impact on motivation and success. In the field of counseling, where staff turnover rates are high, stressful working environments are inevitable, and recidivism is commonplace, this study sheds lights on personality characteristics that may be a contributing factor to counselors who persist through a career filled with daily and long-term adversity.

Evidence gathered through this study, coupled with current literature in the field, suggests two practical implications. First, counselor self-efficacy should be nourished in all counselors, regardless of their level of training or area of expertise. Research has consistently shown, with further evidence provided in this study, that high levels of

counselor self-efficacy predict lower instances of burnout. Counselors should remain mindful of their level of counselor self-efficacy, monitoring it on a regular basis and paying close attention when symptoms of burnout emerge (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). Self-assessment instruments from multiple domains (i.e., anxiety, counselor self-efficacy, burnout) can be used as a gauge either personally by counselors or administered through regular supervision sessions. High levels of anxiety may affect counselor self-efficacy and negatively affect client outcomes; therefore, it is an important component to consider when assessing counselor self-efficacy (Tang et al., 2004). Organizational factors, such as excessive workloads, time constraints, role ambiguity, and lack of support, also contribute to burnout and could be considered an appropriate place for proactive interventions (Morse et al., 2012).

Second, mindset and grit are positively related to counselor self-efficacy and, therefore, should be included in a counselor's professional development and identity. Counselors can foster this individually, but it may also be beneficial to begin to incorporate these concepts into training programs and professional organizations. As an essential part of the counseling profession, counselors regularly practice self-awareness, self-growth, and self-care exercises. These practices can include anything from personal counseling and routine supervision to exercise, mediation, and leisure activities (Lent & Schwartz, 2012). These introspective practices serve as an avenue for better understanding oneself to be fully present with clients, minimize countertransference, and promote overall professional growth, with the hope of reducing the likelihood of burnout (Lent & Schwartz, 2012).

Counselors should include an evaluation of mindset and grit in their regular professional growth activities, which could be implemented through journaling, supervision, and/or self-evaluation tools. Professional activities that target an increase in growth mindset also may prove to be a proactive approach to keeping counselors engaged and promoting self-efficacy.

Limitations and Recommendations

While any study may be limited in various ways, there were five particular limitations to this study that warrant specific attention with regard to the interpretation of the results. First, the study is limited in terms of its generalizability to the total population of professional counselors. While the sample was diverse in terms of the specific areas of counseling, age, and number of years of experience in the field, certain segments of the professional counseling population were not reflected, including, but not limited to, counselors in private practice, counselors who work in inpatient psychiatric facilities, and grief counselors. Certainly, future researchers could extend their samples to represent these subgroups of counselors, seeking to be as comprehensive and representative as possible.

A second limitation of the study is that it did not gather any data related to actual outcomes, only counselor perceptions. This was due to all instruments in this study being self-report. The study did not gather any data related to actual counseling outcomes and did not include client's perceptions of the counseling relationship or outcomes. A recommendation for future research would, thus, be the exploration of mindset and grit on client outcomes. This study was limited in that it gained only the perspective of the

counselor's mindset and level of grit. A future study could include how both the counselor and client's mindsets and levels of grit affect client outcomes in therapy.

The third limitation is based on social desirability bias. All instruments used in this study were relatively transparent, and each of the constructs carried a socially preferred valence; therefore, participants' responses were vulnerable to the social desirability bias. In particular, burnout—although recognized as a prevalent problem in the counseling field—carries a negative connotation. Therefore, it is possible that participants did not feel comfortable expressing the presence of burnout symptoms, regardless of the anonymity in the survey design. Social desirability also bias may have come into play regarding the counselor self-efficacy survey questions.

In addition, the questions were worded in such a way that counselors may have been more prone to giving themselves higher scores due to the alternative, which could have made them feel like an ineffective counselor. One recommendation would be to use a mixed-methods approach, including interviews or focus groups with counselors, where participants would be able to voice their ability to relate to each construct while providing additional context in their answer. This approach may reduce counselor anxiety and the feeling of being forced into selecting a particular answer that they do not fully identify with.

A fourth limitation concerns the validity of the Theory of Intelligence Measure. The measure was adapted to reflect counseling skill by replacing *intelligence* with *counseling skill* in each question. It is unknown whether this change affected the validity of the scale. A recommendation to address this limitation would be to create a new

instrument that is specific to counselor mindset though a scale development and validation study.

The final limitation is that the data gathered were cross-sectional. Cross-sectional data represent information that is gathered at one point in time and, thus, function simply as a snapshot. These types of data are limited in that they cannot describe changes over time or cause-and-effect relationships, which were implied in the proposed meditational process model. A recommendation to address this limitation would be to conduct a similar study using a longitudinal research design. Replicating this study with a longitudinal design would better reflect the process nature of the proposed model and allow for testing the directionality and persistence of the effects.

Based on the results of this study, there is evidence to suggest that mindset and grit play a role in counselor self-efficacy and burnout rates. It remains unclear whether a mediation model is an accurate representation of the relationships between these variables. As noted earlier, it may be worth exploring whether a moderation model is a better representation of the relationships between variables. The existing literature on the relationship between mindset and grit is still in its infancy. The model presented in this study was grounded in the literature but theoretical in the sense that the constructs have never been applied to this particular population. To create the model, the researcher drew on some assumptions where the literature was lacking to bridge the gap between the educational psychology and counseling literature to present a full process model. If the literature were interpreted and applied differently in future research, one may choose to analyze these constructs using a moderation model. It is as yet undiscovered territory; however, it may be beneficial to explore whether level or degree of grit moderates the

relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy, or whether type of mindset moderates the relationship between grit and counselor self-efficacy.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how mindset and grit influence counselor self-efficacy, which ultimately affects counselor burnout. Grounded in the literature, a process model was presented as a theoretical representation of the interactions among constructs. One hundred thirty-six counselors completed an anonymous online survey. Results provided further evidence to the existing literature that suggests a moderate to strong negative relationship between counselor self-efficacy and counselor burnout. Slightly weaker but still significant were the newly established relationships between mindset and counselor self-efficacy as well as grit and counselor self-efficacy. A process model that featured a mediating effect of grit on the relationship between mindset and counselor self-efficacy was presented and tested, but the results did not provide statistically significant evidence to conclude that this mediation effect exists.

This study provides an important contribution to the counseling literature in that it bridges a gap between two promising constructs that are being studied in the education and psychology literature (mindset and grit) and two well-established constructs in the counseling field (counselor self-efficacy and burnout). It brings to light personality characteristics that contribute to motivation and success, which could be beneficial in the field of counseling, where staff turnover rates are high, stressful working environments are inevitable, and recidivism is commonplace. This study highlights the personality characteristics of grit and mindset, which can be fostered by counselors so that they may continue to persevere in a career filled with daily and long-term adversity.

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Appendix A

Demographic Data Questionnaire

What is your age?

- 18–25 years old
- 26–35 years old
- 36–45 years old
- 46–55 years old
- Over 55 years old

I identify my sex as:

- Male
- Female
- Transgender F to M
- Transgender M to F
- Other _____
- Prefer not to disclose

Ethnicity origin (or race) (select all that apply)

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Other _____
- Prefer not to disclose

What is your highest level of education?

- High school diploma or GED
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Master's degree and nationally certified counselor
- Master's degree and licensed professional counselor
- Doctorate
- Other _____

What is your marital status?

- Never married
- Married or domestic partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated

How many years of post-training experience do you have working as a counselor? (clinical experience beyond practicum, internship)

- Less than 1 year
- 1–5 years
- 6–10 years
- More than 10 years

Please identify in what area of counseling you are currently working. (If not currently working, please identify the area where you have the most clinical experience.)

- Mental health
- School
- Career
- Addiction
- Other (please specify) _____

Appendix B

IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board
DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

Duquesne University IRB *Amendment Approval Notification*

To: Bethany Novotny
From: Linda Goodfellow, IRB Chair
Subject: Protocol #2014/12/12
Date: 04/08/2016

The amendment to protocol **Beyond Skill: The role of mindset and grit in reducing counselor burnout** has been approved by the Chair of the IRB on 04/08/2016.

The research remains subject to all stipulations put forth in this IRB's original approval notification and annual review remains on the cycle determined by the original approval.

The amended consent form, email invitation, protocol summary + instruments are attached, stamped with current approval date but original expiration date. You should use the amended stamped forms as original for copies that are distributed or displayed.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Linda M. Goodfellow, PhD, RN, FAAN
Chair of Duquesne University Institutional Review Board
goodfellow@duq.edu

Attachments:
- Protocol 2014-12-12 Amendment Consent Form approved.pdf
- Protocol 2014-12-12 Amendment Email to Participants approved.pdf
- Protocol 2014-12-12 Amendment Protocol Summary approved.pdf
- Protocol 2014-12-12 Amendment Request approved.pdf